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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001154

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SUBJECT: AEF FINISHES ERADICATION IN HELMAND; URUZGAN A
POSSIBLE NEXT TARGET

REF: KABUL 1131

Classified By: DCM Richard B. Norland for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) SUMMARY: The INL-funded Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) concluded poppy eradication operations in Helmand province on April 7 due to continued local civilian resistance and absence of political support. The AEF eradicated 7,573 hectares of poppy in the province since it started operations on February 11, far surpassing last year's total of 1,807 hectares in Helmand. Total eradication, including Governor-Led Eradication, in Helmand this year surpassed 8,000 hectares. The AEF is now investigating the possibility of shifting operations to Uruzgan, a sensitive prospect given Dutch discomfort with eradication as an essential counter-narcotics tactic. END SUMMARY

PROGRESS IN HELMAND

12. (U) On April 7, the Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) destroyed 425.5 hectares along the Nahi Sirraj - Lashkargah border after protesters prevented the AEF from gaining access to the fields the previous day. The AEF logged a full day, but AEF security members fired three to four warning shots at a gathering of protesters who were pelting the operation with rocks. The protesters dispersed, and there was no further violence.

13. (U) At the conclusion of the day's eradication efforts, the AEF's commander, Colonel Wafakesh, informed Embassy representatives in Helmand that the time had come to finish operations in Helmand. He said that provincial officials had withdrawn their support, and he was concerned that further operations would so inflame farmers and local elders that the AEF would not be able to prevent casualties to residents or AEF officers. Embassy consulted with the Ministry of Interior and heard the same concerns. We agreed that it was best to end eradication in Helmand on a high note that increased violence would have destroyed. With 7573.25 hectares of AEF eradication in Helmand, we more than quadrupled our efforts from last year (1807 hectares), and combined with Governor-Led Eradication (500 hectares through April 8), we have helped remove more than 8000 hectares of opium production from the marketplace.

NEXT STEP: PLANNING FOR URUZGAN

14. (U) As the AEF returns to Kabul to refit, repair equipment, and rest, Embassy is investigating the possibility of launching eradication operations in Uruzgan province. Embassy NAS met Governor Monib in Uruzgan on April 3 to discuss counter-narcotics efforts in the province and to address ongoing concerns regarding the Governor's interaction with the INL-funded Poppy Elimination Program. Deputy Interior Minister General Daud and Deputy Minister of Counter Narcotics General Khodiadad, and representatives from the Dutch Embassy (the Netherlands runs the PRT in Uruzgan) and the UK Embassy joined in the visit.

15. (U) All of the visitors were stunned by the meeting. Governor Monib--along with the provincial chief of police, General Qasim, and the leader of the provincial council, Mullah Hamdullah--asserted to the visitors that Uruzgan was making "tremendous progress" on countering opium production and predicted that cultivation would be lower than last year. None of the facts support the Governor's surreal presentation: UNODC predicts cultivation to increase by 50% or more, Governor-Led Eradication has been almost non-existent, and we have seen no evidence that the province conducted any prevention campaign. Given the province's weak security and poor governance, we fear a perfect storm scenario that offers the potential for a massive increase in cultivation there.

16. (C) The Dutch Embassy representative and PRT commander were shocked by Governor Monib's performance, and we used

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this opportunity as a springboard to discuss the possibility of using the AEF to conduct carefully targeted eradication in the province. Uruzgan had never previously entered into planning for the AEF due to Dutch discomfort with eradication, but we have been meeting with the Dutch frequently to discuss Uruzgan and have worked hard to temper their anti-eradication resolve. They now fear that their tenure in Uruzgan may be scarred by absolute failure on counter-narcotics and are open to a discussion about AEF eradication.

17. (C) The Dutch Embassy tells us that their official position is that they support Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS), including its eradication pillar. Within limits, they and the PRT Command will support eradication. However, they will not officially participate in eradication planning. Instead, they will entertain eradication proposals and review them with an eye to how these proposals might affect security within the province: Do insurgents control the area? Will eradication drive residents to join forces with insurgents? Is the proposal sensitive to tribal equities? Early discussions suggest that for the Dutch, the perfect target following these criteria is Jan Mohammad Khan, former governor of Uruzgan, and the owner of large poppy fields west of Tarin Kot City.

18. (C) On April 9, Embassy representatives will meet with Uruzgan's PRT commander and Dutch Embassy representative at RC-South in advance of an aerial reconnaissance mission to assess the viability of conducting eradication activities in Uruzgan. If conditions allow, we expect the AEF to begin eradication in Uruzgan within two weeks.

COMMENT

19. (C) The AEF's eradication this year in Helmand marked real progress over last year. We wanted 10,000 hectares, and we worked hard to push the AEF and GOA officials towards this goal. We fell short, but we are pleased by the progress that the AEF has made in comparison to the previous two years.

Within the limits of negotiated eradication, the AEF achieved more than we might have reasonably expected and has set the stage for a careful review of how our counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency strategies intersect. Now that we have the opportunity to expand AEF operations to Uruzgan province, we see the potential to make a significant impact on Afghanistan's richest poppy-producing provinces. The AEF is sending a message that farmers can no longer hide safely behind weak and incompetent provincial officials. At the same time, the AEF's success helps to strengthen the central government's ability to exert influence beyond Kabul. Operations in Uruzgan would intensify this impact. END

COMMENT

NEUMANN